

Democrats Prove Commitment to Those in Harm's Way

This week, House Democrats salute the troops and veterans who have endured great sacrifice to keep our nation safe. Democrats have stood up for our men and women in uniform time and again, making sure we not only protect our homeland, but take care of those who sacrifice so much defending it.

Defending the Homeland

Democrats have a strategy for Afghanistan and are providing the resources our troops and intelligence agencies need for success. The FY 11 National Defense Authorization Act:

- Supports the President's strategy on both sides of the border of Afghanistan, helping to strengthen our relationships with Pakistan and other key nations in the region, such as Yemen
- Places a greater emphasis on understanding the recruitment methods used by terrorists and taking the necessary action to help prevent them
- Provides \$200 million to address urgent force protection needs in Afghanistan and includes a provision to allow DOD to cut through red tape by expanding its acquisition authority to get equipment to protect our troops

Supporting the Troops

Democrats are steadfast in their support of the troops:

- Providing continuous support to troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan by supplying them with new and better weapons, body armor and mine-resistant vehicles
- Ensured the passage of FY11 National Defense Authorization Act and FY10 Intelligence Authorization Act, which make record investments in our military and intelligence community, providing our brave men and women in uniform with the tools they need to do their jobs, and return home safely

Meeting the Needs of Veterans

Democrats and the Administration are doing more to address the needs of veterans than Republicans ever tried to do in 12 years, even during wartime:

- Updated the G.I. Bill for the 21st Century resulting in \$3.9 billion in tuition, housing, and stipends paid to 292,000 student veterans or their eligible family members.
- Expanded employment opportunities by offering a tax credit to small business for hiring returning veterans through the Recovery Act.
- Increased support for post 9/11 veterans' caregivers by offering caregiver training, access to mental health counseling, 24-hour respite care in the veteran's home and financial support associated with the veteran's care.

- Improved health care access and treatment by providing returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans an additional three years of VA health care eligibility (for a total of 5 years). Also opened up the VA health care system to Priority Group 8 veterans – a group that had been shut out since 2003 by the Bush Administration – and raised the income eligibility threshold.
- Addressed urgent mental health needs of veterans with a much-needed and long-awaited study on veterans' suicide, VA-provided counseling referrals for members of the Armed Forces who are not otherwise eligible for readjustment counseling, comprehensive services to veterans and a 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline, which has served more than 115,000 veterans, family members, and friends, and has saved 10,000 lives. VA simplified the process for claiming service-connected PTSD and expanded its ability to care for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury
- Addressed the benefits backlog by hiring 8,300 additional claims processors. VA has promised to eliminate the backlog by the end of 2010.
- Provided housing support by updating the VA Home Loan Program to protect veterans from any threat of foreclosure for nine months after military service, increased VA home loan limits to keep up with current housing prices and eliminated the equity requirement for veterans opting to refinance with VA loans. Expanded veteran eligibility for VA home loans and increased support services and programs to prevent veteran homelessness.
- Expanded and improved VA services for women veterans, newborn infants of women veterans, and veterans living in rural areas.
- Strengthened VA research efforts by adding \$144 million for medical and prosthetic research, an increase of more than 25% over three years. Increased research funding through the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,
- Added \$23 billion for veterans' health care and services and secured advanced appropriations for veterans' health care, providing a stable and uninterrupted source of funding for veterans services for the first time.